



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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18 ARRESTED IN ICE WORKSITE SECURITY CRACKDOWN

More than half of ship maintenance company's workers found to be employed illegally

SAN DIEGO – U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents today arrested 18 foreign nationals who were working illegally for Naval Coating Incorporated, a San Diego-based company that does maintenance for local ship building businesses, including naval vessels on the U.S. Navy base on 32nd Street.

In a pre-dawn operation, ICE and Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) agents with the cooperation of local U.S. Navy commands fanned out across the county apprehending the 18 men at their homes before they reported for work. The workers, most of whom had security badges authorizing them to enter the local navy base, were identified after agents audited the hiring records of Naval Coating's 167 employees. That audit found that 86 of the employees on the company's payroll were not authorized to work in the United States.

Today's operation is part of Operation Safe Cities, an ongoing ICE worksite enforcement initiative to protect sensitive area businesses from possible security breaches.

"When a person uses fraud or false documents to obtain a job, they mask not only their identities, but also their motives and criminal history if they have one," said Michael Unzueta, San Diego special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations. "As part of Operation Safe Cities, ICE agents have audited thousands of employee records at local businesses. By doing so, we are closing a loophole that might be exploited by potential terrorists or saboteurs to gain access to sensitive and vulnerable worksites."

Of the workers arrested today, 17 are Mexican nationals and one is Guatemalan. All used counterfeit immigration documents and social security cards to gain employment. Two of the men had illegally re-entered the United States after a prior deportation, one of whom has a prior criminal conviction for drug smuggling. They will either be voluntarily returned to Mexico or deported after facing administrative charges for violating immigration laws.

In conjunction with the operation today, agents confiscated 8 fake social security cards and 6 Alien Registration Cards and 13 valid security badges.

Today's operation is part of an ongoing 15-month joint investigation involving ICE and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service. Naval Coating Incorporated is not facing criminal charges or sanctions at this time, but the investigation is ongoing. Agents say they received several leads in today's investigation from ICE's national tip line (866-DHS-2ICE).

Since Operation Safe Cities was launched, San Diego ICE agents have identified and reviewed the employment records of approximately 543 businesses whose civilian employees have access to military bases in San Diego and Imperial Counties. Those businesses represent a workforce of nearly 13,500 employees.

Counting today's figures, ICE agents have now arrested more than 163 individuals as part of Operation Safe Cities. Among those companies recently targeted as part of the initiative are Marine & Restaurant Fabricators, National Steel and Shipbuilding Company (NASSCO), and several businesses in the transportation industry.

Other businesses scrutinized by ICE, NCIS and local U.S. Navy Commands as part of the initiative, include numerous contractors that provide services on the Point Loma Navy Base and Naval Air Station North Island where more than 100 workers were apprehended. Locally, ICE agents also arrested five unauthorized workers employed by Northrop Grumman.

To aid employers, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services operates the Basic Pilot Program, a Web-based system that enables businesses to verify the employment eligibility of newly hired workers. Nationwide, there are more than 15,000 employers using the Basic Pilot Program, including more than 220 here in San Diego. Interested employers are urged to call the agency's toll-free number [888-464-4218] to obtain more information about the program.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.